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EMPOWERMENT OF THE MARGINALISED THROUGH TECHNOLOGY IN MODERN  
INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

Modern Indian English literature is multicolored and technicolored. Of late the writers have sought to explore the cultural patterns of the subcontinent through new tools like Cultural Materialism, Neo-Marxism, New Historicism, so on and so forth to expose the power structures that marginalized the productive communities for centuries together. Hegemony that existed for hundreds of years in its myriad forms has been the focal point for many in the genres of poetry, novel, short story, biography and criticism. The writers are in the forefront in the usage of technology for enhancing the aesthetics of the subaltern literature in the wake of technocentrism prevailing all over the globe. Cross-cultural communications have propelled indigenous exploited communities to focus on the promotion of ethnic identifications enshrined in traditional languages. It is an undenyng fact that technology while hegemonising the dominant classes, endeavored to empower the marginalized in the civilizational processes. The well-known writers Mahaswetha Devi, Arundathi Roy, Salmon Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry and the regional translated writers Bama, Gogu Shyamala have sought to delineate their narratives through technopolitic vision for empowering the marginalized. The paper studies the emerging new vistas of resistance against hegemony in the backdrop of science and technology, envisioned by the two exponential texts: 'My Father Balaiah' (2011), a gripping biographical narrative of an uncompromising subaltern by YB Satyanarayana, and "Father May be an Elephant and Mother Only a Small Basket, But..'" (2012), a semi auto-biographical narrative of collection of twelve translated short stories by Gogu Shyamala. Both the texts universalize the agony of the marginalized; portray the protagonists as emulating models with cultural consciousness and establish a strong foothold in the emerging canon of resistance and reconstruction.

**KEY WORDS:** Marginalized, exploitation, cultural consciousness, empowerment, subaltern canon, hegemony, ethnocentrism, resistance, reconstruction

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Technology has become man's second nature in the modern world. All the walks of life have come under the influence of technology accelerating explorations in human culture and existence. Developments in technology have become important elements in politics with widespread global, economic and socio-cultural implications. By positing technology in a broader cultural, political and socio-economic context, the real relationship between culture and technology can be established. Technology has become a new element in the cultures of the changing communities that have been exploited hitherto. Culture has its technology and it is this technology that enables man to transform his socio-physical environment and his future! In the words of Raymond Williams, 'culture comprises the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group. It includes not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs.' Culture is thus the totality of the technological, sociological and ideological features of a society.

The global concerns, shifting paradigms and cross-cultural communications brought together by computers, internet and other ultra-modern devices have transformed the nature, analysis and understanding of literature. The issues of society, culture, politics, gender, and race have become the concerns of the writers across the globe. Indian writing in English too is not far away from these shifting paradigms. Modern Indian English literature is multicolored reflecting the hues of many layers of cultural paradigms. It has come of age withstanding many restraints in innumerable ways as women witting, subaltern writing, diaspora writing, regional writing so on so forth. Indian literary spectrum is wide and ever evolving, imbibing all kinds of local and global changes in the socio-cultural arenas as well as science and technology.

The Indian ethos of science and technology are as old as socio-cultural ethos, barring a few centuries of eclipse in the medieval times. The emergence of modern science in the West has had its impact on the Indian society, causing the much needed impetus for writers to explore the aesthetics influenced by the growth of science, industry and technology. Until the advent of modern Western technological influence in the Eastern world, Indian literature explored myth, lore, romance, metaphysical world and the imaginary worlds below and above with religious fervor dominating all the spheres of life.

With the presence of English language on the Indian soil, the situation has changed and the writers influenced by the values of Western democracy, humanism, and industrialism, turned to the harsh realities of life exploring the inherently imbibed conflicts of the subcontinent. The first Indian English-writing trio: Mulk Raj Anand, R K Narayana and Raja Rao made inroads into the paradoxes and contrasts that India was: the turbaned Maharajas and the hunger stricken millions, the snake charmers, the sadhus and the sanyasis, the wealthy and the weak, the musclemen and the moderates, the promiscuity and the penniless, the inhuman exploitation and the barbaric ignorance- a wounded civilization with a lofty and glorious heritage traversing into modernity with its multiplicity of cultures and linguistic variations.

The writers at once found the sublime and the grotesque co-existing in one place causing the human drama of unfathomable magnitude. The multiple contradictions lead to multiple voices in Indian writing with Mulk Raj Anand focusing on inhuman exploitation, R K Narayan on feebleness and eccentricity of emerging modern Indian and Raja Rao on traditional mores of metaphysics and self-reflexivity. The writers who followed the trailblazing trio succeeded in keeping up the momentum of the Gandhian whirlwind and the blowing Western breezes in describing their characters. Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonkar, Kamala Markendeya, Nayanthara Sahagal, Anitha Desai, Bharathi Mukherjee have portrayed the Indian ethos to suit to the growing aesthetic needs of the new Indian in the post-colonial era.

Indian writing in English in its indigenous diversity of paradox and unpredictability of reception and resistance of adaptation and assimilation is striving and establishing a mark of its own identity in the world of global phenomenon of English literature. Multiplicity of languages and plurality of cultural existence makes the writers romp home in the international language of English. Salmon Rushdie, Arundathi Roy, Rohinton Mistry, Vikram Seth have inviolable touch of modern and postmodern tools devised through evolution in their narrations to whip at the strong conventional forte of the Indian ethos.

Taking a clue and following the footsteps of the leading modern Indian English writers are the regional writers: Bama, Mahaswetha Devi, Gogu Shyamala and others who see pathos in the emerging Indian ethos.

These writers whip at the age old feudalism, irrationality and orthodoxy to bring out sufferance experienced by the neglected, devaluated and exploited communities of the sub-continent in a most poignant, sometimes satirical ways. Most of these writers are being translated with a view to transnationalise and globalize the local cultures in English. Today the writer in English is just another Indian writing in Telugu, Tamil, Bengali, Malayalam, Marathi or Gujarathi. The scientific and technological advances during the last five decades have further pushed litterateurs to dwell hitherto unknown realms of productivity, power centers, native cultures, devaluated communities and neglected dialects. Mohan Ramanan and P Sailaja in their editorial note to 'English and the Indian Short Story' have analyzed that 'British colonial rule and English proved to be catalysts in the creation of this modern sensibility. This modern sensibility, as we shall see, is deeply influenced by the experience of colonial rule and the sentiment of nationalism.'

Indian subcontinent of post-colonial period, having experienced turbulent times for over thousand years, is a land with a million efflorescent cultures. The dominant cultures of the upper castes, the moorings of the middle class, the cultures of the marginalized (Dalit) within which the productive cultures, the tribal cultures etc. are maintaining their distinct identities, in spite of the much heard talk of change, development, globalization so on so forth by the powers that be. Historical forces and power politics have held the country in the sway and caused continuation of hegemonic forces in politics and culture. The devaluated, the exploited and the marginalized communities have struggled to ascertain their identity in the socio-cultural arena. Hegemony of the empowered is still a demotivating factor for many who are out to usher in a grass-roots change by deconstructing the cultural materialism of the hegemonic forces and reconstructing the cultural consciousness of the marginalized.

The post-colonial perceptions augmented by technological impetus have led to the emergence of new explorations in the regional literatures, producing the new genres of biography, autobiography besides the conventional genres of poetry, fiction and drama. The Oxford Dictionary defines Biography as 'history of the lives of individual men as a branch of literature.' In the words of Harold Nicolson, the Biography is 'a truthful record of an individual, composed as a work of art.' Whereas in an Autobiography the author writes the story of his own life and achievements. Its aim like that of a biography is a successful presentation of personality and in the best examples of the period to which he belongs.

The two exponential texts studied in this paper: 'My Father Balaiah'(2011) by Y B Satyanarayana, a biography of un compromising subaltern; and 'Father may be an Elephant and Mother only a Small Basket, But..'(2012) by Gogu Shyamala, a semi-autobiography mark the resurgence of the post-colonial productive cultures that have gained a rebirth owing to modern scientific and technological consciousness in the backdrop of unending exploitation of the productive communities by the dominant forces.

The biography 'My Father Balaiah' portrays the life and intense struggles of protagonist Balaiah who faces innumerable hurdles in his journey of life. 'It is a history of relentless struggle of an untouchable community against social and economic discrimination, against oppressive caste hierarchy, against feudal conditions and against ridicule and humiliation.' It presents the socio-cultural landscape of the marginalized communities of the Telangana region of over two hundred years. 'In temporal reckoning, it stretches over a period of great change and turbulence in Indian history from colonial times to Independent India.' It is also a story of changing lives.' Balaiah joins Indian Railways as a box man and reconstructs his life and family of nine children in and around Secunderabad.

The semi-autobiography 'Father may be an Elephant and Mother only a Small Basket, But. .' is a collection of twelve short stories that portray the life of the writer Gogu Shyamala in Telugu. The innumerable characters: children, young, middle aged and the elders and their struggles entwine with the protagonist. The short stories are translated by individual translators and render universality to the socio-cultural life of the marginalized productive communities of Telangana region. Each of these stories contributes to the aesthetics of the subaltern writing and the author's journey of self- discovery is refurbishing of a world and a community that has experienced agony, apathy, oppression and exploitation for thousands of years. The characters have an organic connection with the family, community and nature and culminate into the protagonist Ellamm, who is the alter ego of the writer. The texts employ the native idiom and bring out the agony, besides the mirth and

joy of the unassumed characters of the productive communities. Gogu Shyamala having worked for about two decades with leftist organizations moves to Hyderabad for reconstructing her life and family.

The scientific perceptions on the part of the writers enabled new subject formations and unfolded the drama of the exploitation based in the emotional counterpoint of the old and new. Denzin defines language as a 'Technology for extending the potential of the idea to fix experience, thereby permitting the user to posit a relation with the world.' The two texts are the best examples for positing the protagonists, male and female, in the all-pervading world of science and technology, waging war against hegemony empowered by scientific temperament in resisting and reconstructing a new democratic framework for a happy, equal and exploitation-free coexistence. The scientific temperament is very much visible in the narrations and of the protagonists, 'Abbasayulu had got an appointment as the signaler in the telecommunications department of the railways. This was the job one had to undertake before becoming a stationer master..' (P-114-My Father Balaiah) 'Women in the fields helped her deliver and cut the child's umbilical cord with a sickle. They told us that they had taken mother and child home on a bullock cart' (P-25-Father may be an Elephant...)

The two texts though explore local cultures, universalize the democratic processes of resistance, wading through all kinds of oppression. Gogu Shyamala and YB Satyanarayana are first generation learners from the marginalized community and YB Satyanarayana has English education background with which he could reach to the position of a Professor. Both the narrators make use of scientific temperament in their narrations and construct the new resistant worlds of Balaiah and Ellamma. While Ellamma is an icon of the productive communities and Balaiah is symbolic of the sturdiness of the productive cultures that have drawn inspiration for change from industrial and scientifically temperamental background. Ellamma constantly draws inspiration from the industrial world and scientific spirit of the mega city of Hyderabad; and Balaiah draws it from the Indian Railways with which he is associated as an employee. The traditional and contemporary worlds developing an indigenous sensibility lead the protagonists towards a change, not only in their lives but also in their families and communities they live in.

The two protagonists pass through three stages: subservience and slavery, defiance and resistance, desperate cultural nativity and identity and reach to a stage of universality with their creative integration. They cleverly establish themselves as emulating models surpassing the binary opposites of 'nature and culture', 'chaos and civility'. The reader can perceive colonial hangover in the emergence of protagonists but it is through the window of democratic scientific temperament and fervor that has embraced the cultures across the globe during the last one hundred years. It is a paradox that industrial technologies that have further hegemonised the dominant classes in the Indian subcontinent, now come to the rescue of the marginalized, with the conscious protagonists making use of the same for resistance and reconstruction.

English literature stimulated literary creations in many Indian languages. Similarly Western scientific temperament stimulated native suppressed and exploited communities to rethink and resist the exploitation of the oppressor. The political and cultural fermentation coupled with technological advances in the third world countries have regrouped the marginalized sections to raise the protest, sometimes violently, for equal democratic space and integration with the mainstream societies. Undisputedly, Balaiah and Ellamma represent the great change that has swept the subcontinent during the last six decades. The cultural fervor gave them more than sufficient impetus to a surge of creative activity. 'Untouchables in the railway colonies openly defied such social customs, and began to sport clothes similar to those worn by caste Hindus. The women began to wear their saris in such a style that their ankles were covered, and they could afford to wear gold jewelry.' (P-68-My Father Balaiah) 'Dora, don't pay me coolie wages. Just give your daughter away as a jogini. Tell her to do the soothsaying during the festival. I will pay her wages.' Saying this, Saayamma pounded the table in front of the dora with her first (P-63-Father may be an Elephant...) The narrators, inheriting a strong cultural consciousness from the productive communities, step out to dispel the preconceived notions of hunger, illness, backwardness as they instill strong elements of resistance and change in the protagonists

The advent of the 21st century marked a significant paradigm shift in almost all walks of life. The issues of society, politics, gender, morality are reoriented and explored with reference to the changing necessities of the communities. In India, writers, instead of informing a typical Indian cultural background and traditional

Indian cultural ethos, turned to hitherto neglected and devaluated cultures and ethos to instill neo-liberal spirit of enquiry coupled with modern technocentrism. The post-colonial perception of cultures and explorations make the writers expose the subtle strategies employed to make the colonized people to take their subjugated position as something natural and transcendental.

The writers also portray the functioning of almost the same power politics that defines the relations between the power wielding people and the people kept at the margins even after the end of political imperialism, as the colonial hangover still continues to prevail in many corridors of power causing misery and sorrow to millions of exploited communities. As the inhuman ignorance and apathy for the suffering continues in all walks of life by the concerned, the democratic systems now talk of ushering in of the technologies to mitigate the sorrow and sufferings of the marginalized and exploited communities in the subcontinent with a view to bring out qualitative changes in their lives.

Raymond Williams viewed culture as a 'productive process,' part of the means of the production. The two texts are the best examples of analysis of the marginalized communities and their cultures and how marginalized cultures can make a comeback and sustain with the neo-democratic spirit in the backdrop of science and technology. The narration of both texts combines the spirit of deconstruction with the ideological orientation of humanist feminism and democratic realism. According to Raymond Williams, 'Realism as embodied in its great tradition, is a touchstone in this, for it shows, in detail, that vital interpretation, idea into feeling, person into community, change into settlement, which we need, as growing points, in our divided time.'(P-590)

The technological imperative emerges as the driving force of the century, impelling societies and cultures to a seamless equality. Under this imperative natural processes were superseded by artificial one and technological developments took humanity further and further from the limits of their biological organism. Technology in the present century is not neutral force or objective apparatus, but material practice that necessarily had political and social causes and effects; and it is to be now considered as a generative cultural intensity that makes us just as much as we make it. That's why we see the two texts as the cultural organisms that generated Balaiah and Ellamma to lead the members of the family and community from the throes of sufferance to liberation, deriving strength and courage that underpin their cultural base. They derive spirit, enthusiasm and the much required courage to challenge the domination of the exploiting forces from the fountainhead of their productive cultures.

Indian Railways introduced by English men have brought in unprecedented changes in the lives of millions of subalterns so much so the agrarian technologies have in the lives of productive communities in rural areas. The narrator ascertains the socio-economic changes as, 'The higher caste drivers and Brahmin guards still preferred the Sudras to the untouchables when it came to carrying their boxes. But the untouchable box men gained entry and could move freely in the Anglo-Indian houses, a new experience for them. Thus Christianity embraced these outcastes into its fold and, in the form of the British administration and better opportunities, opened the doors of education for them.'(P-90-My Father Balaiah) 'Ellamma set out to cook .She had shifted the hearth to the front yard, and placed it under the neem tree because bags of grain now blocked the passage from the front room to the kitchen...(P-162) 'Ellamma's warmth is like that of earth itself. That's why she could cultivate twenty acres of land and give birth to many children, both the house and the granary are overflowing with grain.' (P-171-Father may be an Elephant...)

The post-modern writings depict the socio-cultural and historical developments in a specific way. The realism in the texts stimulates the reader and touches the sensibilities so as to ponder over the agony being experienced by the protagonists. The opening scene in the latest Tamil movie *Kabali*, the hero appears reading 'My Father Balaiah' that has led to alarming sales of the text across the globe. The semi-autobiography of Gogu Shyamala is now being translated into German language. These instances indicate that the texts are anthropogenic and bring out the inherent suffering that man has experienced ever since the dawn of civilization.

The protagonist Balaiah with his cultural consciousness and intuitive urge for survival and contemporary awareness on the railways overcomes the hurdles being posed by the hegemonic elements, defeats cultural

determinism, and consolidates himself as an emulating model in reconstructing his children's future. The protagonist Ellamma facing hegemony from patriarchy and caste domination emerges as an icon, defeating biological determinism and leads the family and her children into a modern scientific democratic world where all human beings find equality, peace, happiness and mutual respect. The narrations are eco-conscious, technopolitic and nativist to universalize the binaries of hegemony and resistance.

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